A large commercial airplane is shown from a low angle, flying through a dark blue night sky. The aircraft's wings and fuselage are illuminated by its own lights. Both engines are engulfed in bright orange and yellow flames, suggesting a major malfunction or crash. A small figure of a person is visible on the side of the fuselage. The background shows a dark, starry sky with a hint of a cityscape at the bottom left.

W. Maxwell Prince

Martín Morazzo

Chris O'Halloran

volume seven

Ice
Cream
Man™

The logo for 'Ice Cream Man' is positioned in the lower right quadrant. It features the brand name in a white, stylized font. The text is surrounded by several colorful stars in red, yellow, and blue. Below the text, there are two red ice cream cones with yellow sticks.





VOLUME SEVEN

• CERTAIN DESCENTS •

WRITTEN BY **W. MAXWELL PRINCE**

ART BY **MARTÍN MORAZZO**

COLORS BY **CHRIS O'HALLORAN**

LETTERING BY **GOOD OLD NEON**

COVER DESIGN BY **SHANNA MATUSZAK & TRICIA RAMOS**

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **GOOD OLD NEON**

"Well, by now you must know yourself, honey, whatever you do, life don't stop. It only sits a minute and dreams a dream."

-Grace Paley, "Goodbye and Good Luck"



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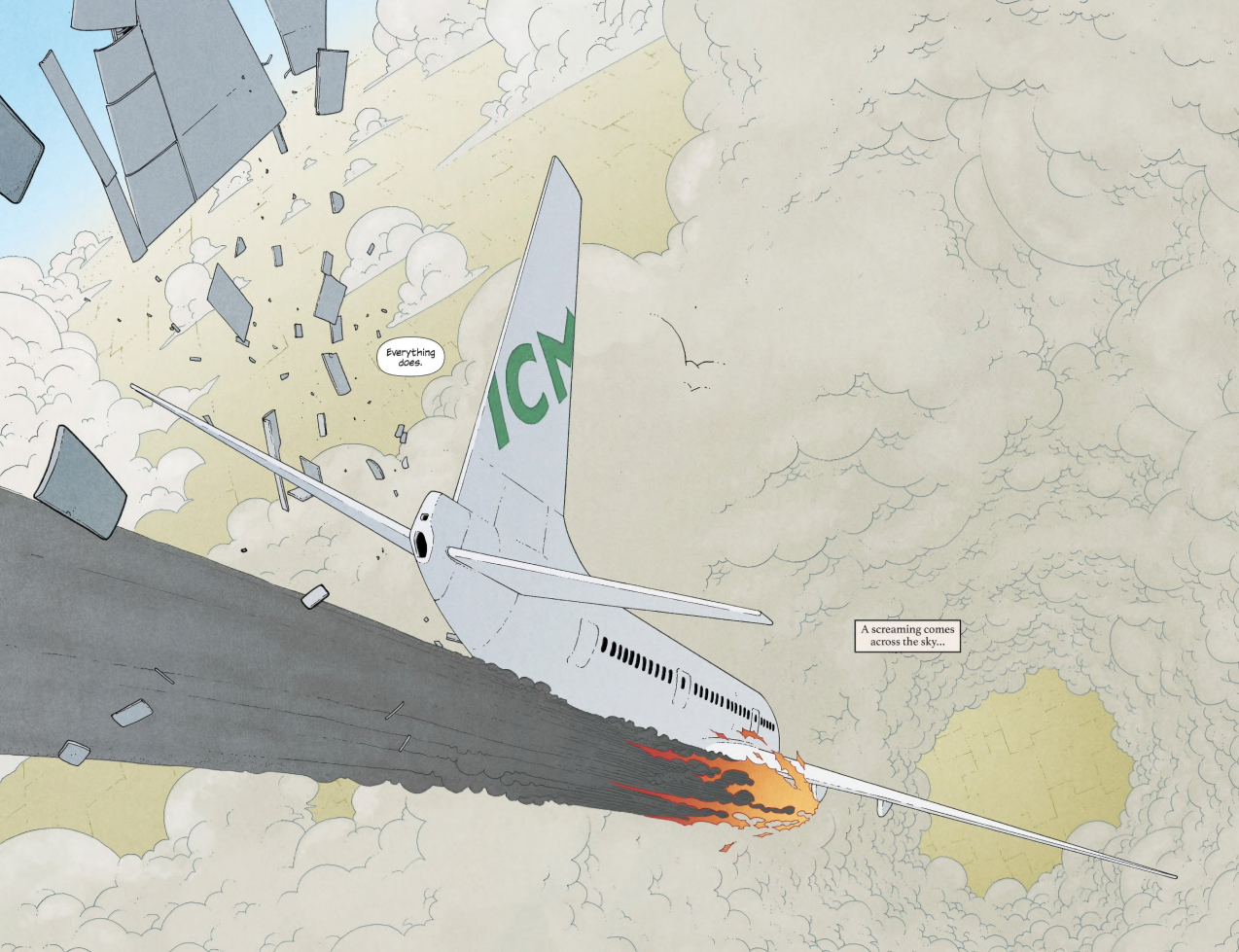
What direction are you headed?
Email wmaxwellprince@gmail.com

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CHAPTER
25
CERTAIN
DESCENTS





Everything
does.

A screaming comes
across the sky...



Somebody
get me a goddamn
parachute!

That'd be
Harold.

Harold's in a bit of
denial about the *direction*
things are heading.



No, no,
no...

His fellow passengers,
on the other hand...



We're going
down, love!
Cheers!



The kid on his iPad
knows the score:

Down, down,
down...



In El Paso, in the middle of his son's little league game, Reggie Carlisle's blood pressure falls to 70/40.



So as his wife, his son, and members of the visiting team gather around his supine body, Reggie does his very best to articulate this fact to the crowd:



Hold on, Reg. Someone's on the way.

And then, suddenly...



Peeking out from behind the lovely silhouette of his wife's head...

Reg?

Reggie Carlisle believes he sees an angel...



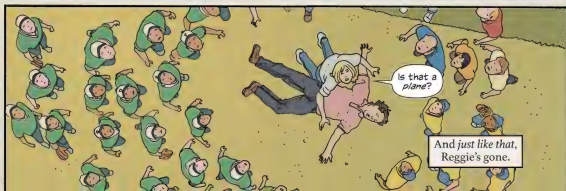
...a giant, fiery-winged seraph come to relieve him of his [considerable] pain.

Where she comes for me...



Is that a plane?

And just like that, Reggie's gone.





Hey,
Joe?

Yeah,
Ned?



You ever
think about what
happens after
we die?

7t. Not
really.

Being
alive's confusing
enough.



I can
barely make heads
or tails of my
phone bill.



I think
about it.

...it's *all*
I think
about.



Heaven, hell,
purgatory. Or
maybe we're
reborn...

What, like
reincarnation?



Back to Harold now, who in his eagerness to procure a parachute has forgotten the sacred rule of overhead luggage...



What can be said about harried Harry to give you a better sense of the man?

There's something...

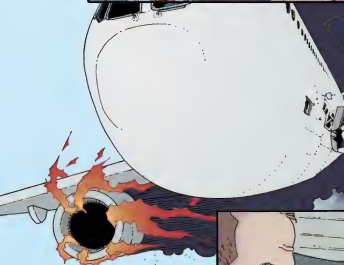


He's a data analyst; he's got a wife and two kids; he's Protestant—and a pretty decent neighbor.

I saw it...



For all intents and purposes, he's what one might call a "good guy."



But therein lies the ruby-red rub...



Bad things happen to good people all the time...



Gravity tugs on everything.

Across the border, as a "coyote" leads Corina Garcia and a handful of others through a treacherous mountain pass...

Por aquí.
Rápido.

The baby in
her belly drops.

Dios
mío...

¿Corina,
estás bien?

Es la bebé.
Creo que está
naciendo.

This phenomenon of the reproductive
process is something called *lightening*—
when the head of an unborn child descends
into the lower pelvis of the mother.

No tenemos
tiempo que perder. Los
peligros en las montañas
son muchos:

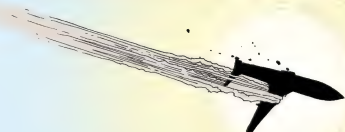
Viboras, el
cartel, la Patrulla
Fronteriza.

From there, the baby's head works its way
through the eleven stations of labor—
a kind of Catholic devotion *in utero*.

The pressure on the pubic
bone is unlike anything
Corina has ever known.

¡Jorge, por
favor! Está en trabajo
de parto.

Me estoy
muriendo. Se que
es así.



Corina sees what she's certain is a *vulture*.







Think, Harold.
Think. Where would
they keep it?

Ahem.
Pardon
me?



Do you know if
they're going to be
serving a meal on
this flight?



You're
fucking joking,
right?


I know,
I know. It's like
that old stand-
up cliché:



"What's the
deal with airplane
food?"



But seriously...
do you think they'll
be coming around
soon?



The sun at the end of the day; the blood sugar of a hungry diabetic; Dante in *The Divine Comedy*...



The descents are endless.

It was the **stewardess**, you know.



She checked her bag--it had a bomb in it.



You can take that mask off, kid.



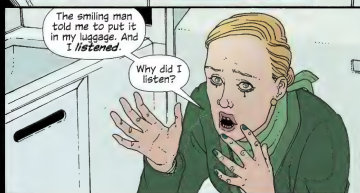
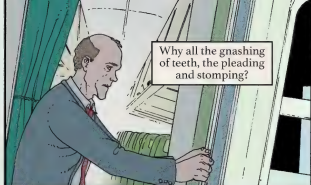
You're supposed to put it on me first. That's what the rules say.

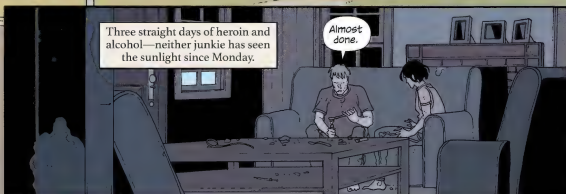
...she's going to **HELL**, that flight attendant.



All of us are!

So why fight it?





Time *elongates*, stretches out in one direction and then snaps back the other way, like a rubber band.

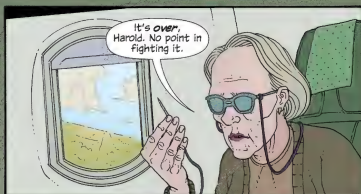


She sees a plane on fire, ceding itself to the Earth's magnetic pull.

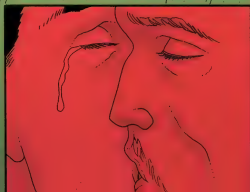
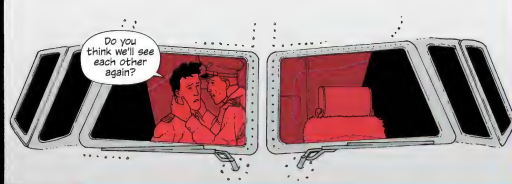














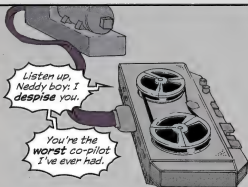
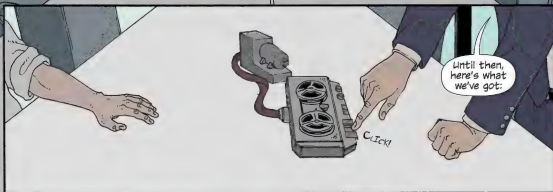
Some Days Later...

Here it is, Sarge...

Aviation
Safety
Bureau

The black box from Flight ICM 25.

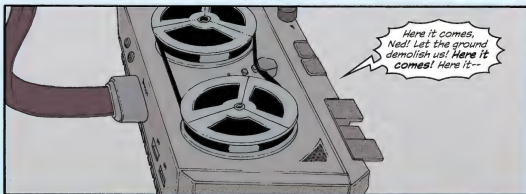
...crew at the crash site is still trying to confirm just what led to catastrophic engine failure.





And guess what? If being "reborn" means I'd have to see your creepy little face again?

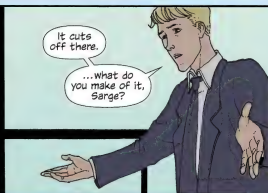
Then you can keep it--I'll take death.



Here it comes, Ned! Let the ground demolish us! Here it comes! Here it--



Hh.



It cuts off there.

...what do you make of it, Sarge?



What's there to make? Bad things happen all the time.




Who are we to question why?



Who
are we at
all?





BONUS STORY: “PARALOGUE”

Many universe cycles from now...

From the Liminal Spaces
they come, creatures on the
razor's edge of reason...



The Tree People, their limbs aloft, waving in the hot-cold breeze of this barren non-place...



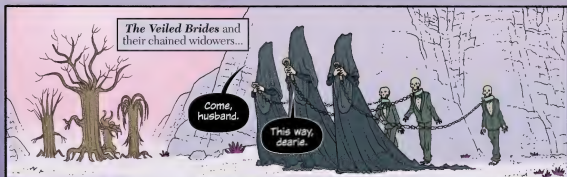
Leaves fall off their fingertips and sputter into the air, riding frigid siroccos high into the upper spheres...



From the Last Light they come...



The Veiled Brides and their chained widowers...



Come, husband.

This way, dearie.

Will you hurry, Gerald? We're gonna be late!



The Flayed Folk,
their every secret as
visible as day...

What are
you looking
at?

S-sorry
for staring.

And, too, of course, *The*
Bug-Eyed Bogeymen...

They come.

All of them...

**The Candy
Stripers.**

**The
Gendarme.**

The Priests (from highest to least)...



Satan and his cohort, relegated here to mere spectators of proceedings far beyond their limited and laughable purview.



The Angels of Yesternight.

The Pointillist Shapeshifters of Tomorrow Morning.

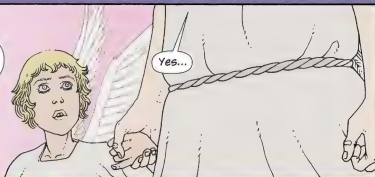


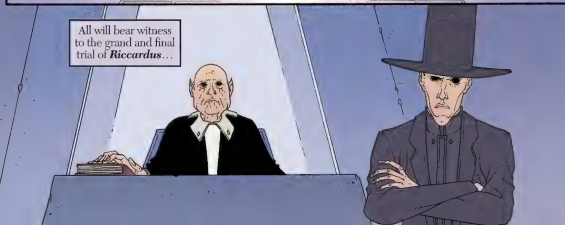
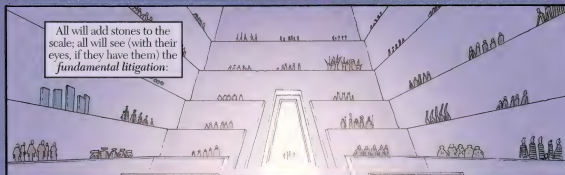
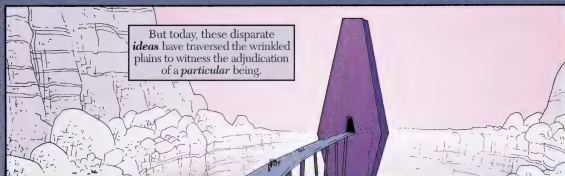
All have come—all have heeded the call.



Is it true, Poppa? They're putting him on trial?

Yes...





...the demon-god with
the *ice cream* smile.

Who,
me?

To Be Continued...
or Not...Somewhere
Toward the **End of
the Road.**



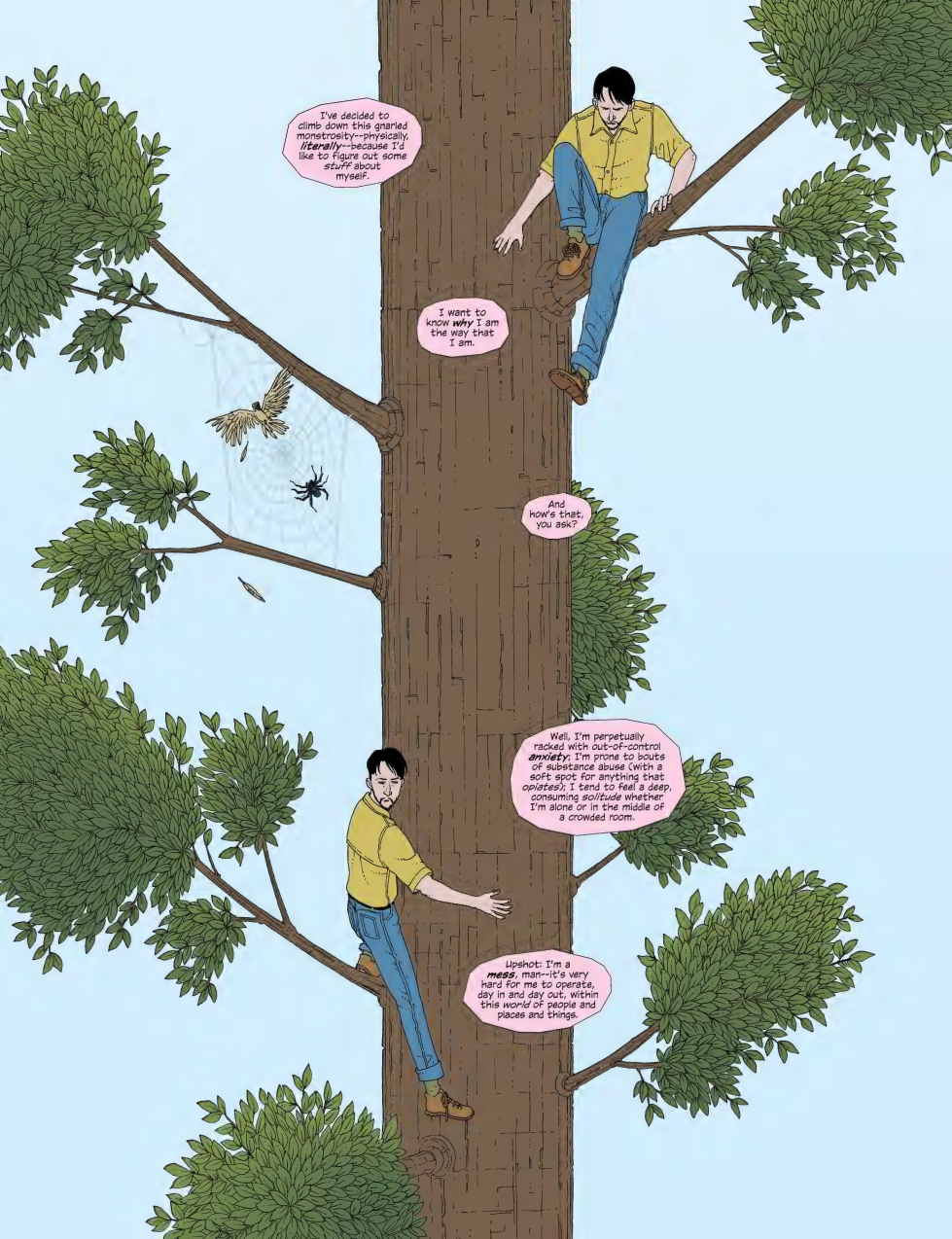
CHAPTER 26

UNFORTUNATE
ANCESTRY

**PLEASE ROTATE
YOUR BOOK
90° CLOCKWISE**

THERE, THAT'S BETTER.
NOW, PLEASE MEET
MICHAEL:



A man with dark hair, wearing a yellow short-sleeved button-down shirt and blue jeans, is climbing a large, brown tree trunk. He is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame, with his left leg hooked over a branch and his right foot on the trunk. He is looking down with a somber expression. The tree has thick, textured bark and several large, leafy green branches extend from it. In the background, a faint, hazy city skyline is visible against a light blue sky. A small bird is flying to the left, and a black spider is on a branch below it.

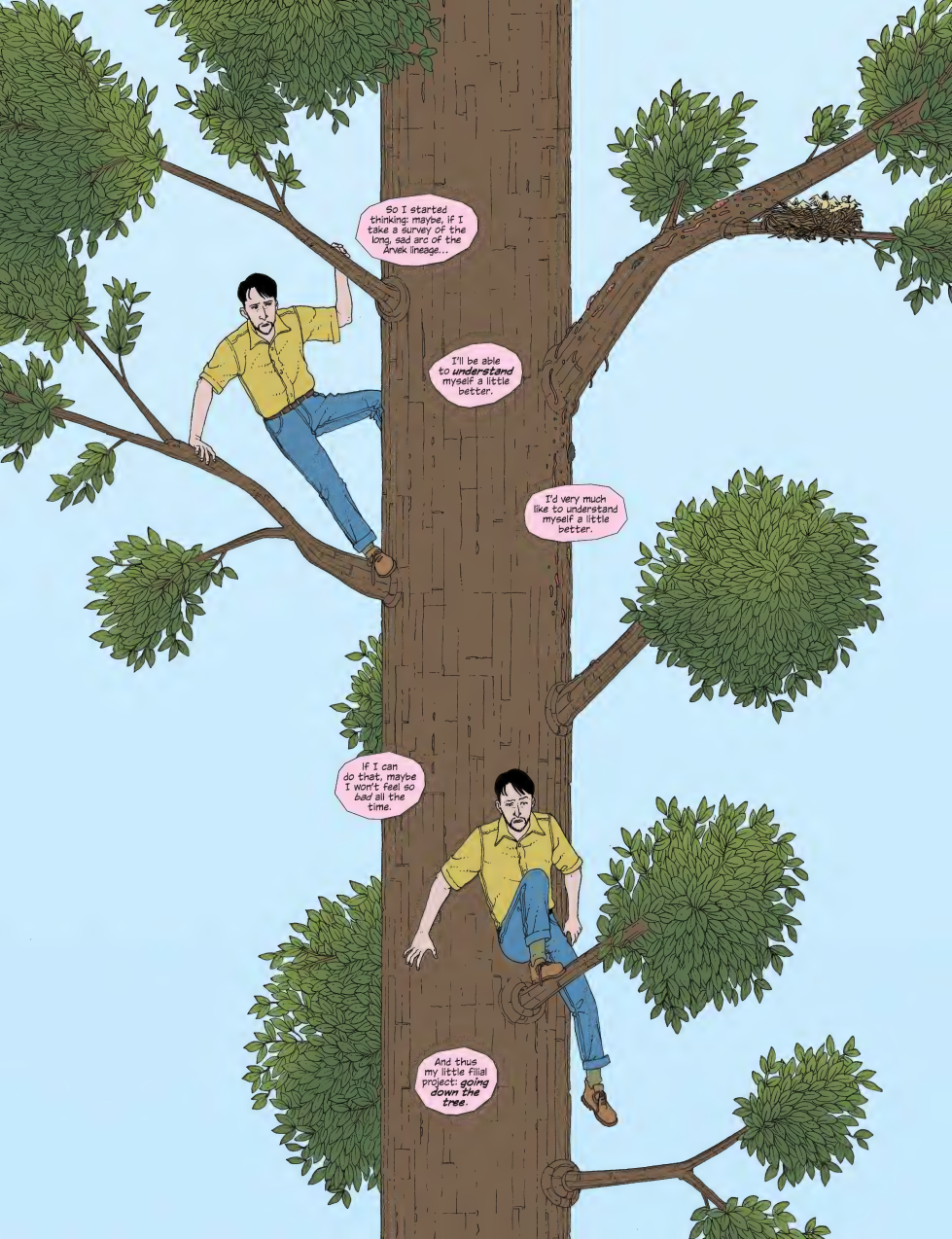
I've decided to climb down this gnarled monstrosity--physically, *literally*--because I'd like to figure out some stuff about myself.

I want to know why I am the way that I am.

And how's that, you ask?

Well, I'm perpetually racked with out-of-control *anxiety*; I'm prone to bouts of substance abuse (with a soft spot for anything that *opiates*); I tend to feel a deep, consuming *solitude* whether I'm alone or in the middle of a crowded room.

Upshot: I'm a *mess*, man--it's very hard for me to operate, day in and day out, within this world of people and places and things.



So I started thinking maybe if I take a survey of the long, sad arc of the Arvek image...

I'll be able to *understand* myself a little better.

I'd very much like to *understand* myself a little better.

If I can do that, maybe I won't feel so sad all the time.

And thus my little filial project: *going down the tree.*

The farthest I can trace my family back is to 1922, when **Yitzhak Arbek**, a calligrapher from East Poland, emigrated to America via Ellis Island...

Yitzhak was just nineteen, and left his parents (my great-great-grandfather and -grandmother) to come to this fabled land of promise and opportunity.

He was, by most accounts, a veritable **master** of Fins penmanship.

In certain circles, my great-grandfather was renowned for the **charisma** of his lowercase letters; his loopy L's and cruciform T's seemed to dance across the page as if part of a phonic ballet. Just look:

luckily split

In mere months, Yitzhak was situated with a job drawing posters for a big advertising firm. He married the daughter of a local grocer, and brought into this world my grandmother, **Mary Ellen Arbek** (more on her in a bit).

As near as anyone could tell, of Yitzhak was **proof positive** of the American Dream and its transformational power.

...but things, as is their wont, **changed**. With the advent and proliferation of the printing press, the art of ornate lettering slowly became **outmoded**—no one needed a man with a "fancy hand."

Yitzhak lost his job and was forced to teach handwriting for pennies at a small parochial school; this, incidentally, is when he started smoking dope.

According to his journals (which become nearly **illegible** at this point), he spent his meager pay at an underground opium den...

...and it was there where he expired on the dirty floor of a dark, backroom.

Some years after Yitzhok's death, Mary Ellen and my great-grandma went out west, to San Francisco.

In a letter to a friend, my great-granny said she liked "the rigidity of the Golden Gate—such a lovely antithesis to the waviness and unreliability of cursive letters."

The two women got jobs in a denim factory, where they sewed buttons, zippers, and rivets onto pair after pair of cheap blue jeans.

It was hard work that paid little; it took an immense toll on both of them.

For her part, Mary Ellen found herself frequenting the Bay Area's myriad bars, speakeasies, and saloons—anything to take the edge off after a fourteen-hour shift on the factory floor.

And wouldn't you know it, she discovered she had a taste for *me* whiskey...

She had a taste for *other* stuff, too...

And it wasn't long before Grandma Mary Ellen was pregnant out of wedlock; she gave birth to my dad in 1950, at the age of twenty-two.

She died during delivery.

My old man
(Joe "JB" Arbek) emerged
from the California Foster
system in the mid-60s
with an acoustic guitar
and about seven dollars
to his name.

Rock in
the morning! Rock
around noon!

He busked
for spare change in
Haight-Ashbury, singing
cover songs nobody
wanted to hear
anymore.

The hippie scene
cut them swallowed him
whole: his first "experiment"
with LSD turned into
a full-fledged way
of life.

...the dude
dropped more acid
than anyone I've
ever known.

When he
eventually got drafted
to go to Vietnam, peace-
loving beatnik JB
Arbek high-tailed
it to Canada...

Rocket
to the fucking
moon.

And made a
life for himself
across the northern
border...

He had a son: me.
But being a father was
hard for my old man--
all those psychedelics
did something weird
and permanent
to his brain.

This world is
haunted by a man
in an ice cream
truck...

He'd say the
strangest things
sometimes...

He passed away
last year, wholly unable
to recognize my face
from down in his
hospital bed.

...and I've been
drunk or high pretty
much every day
since.



You see
it, right? The
pattern.

A giant fucking
quite of misery and
disappointment,
stretching back
a century...

An opium-
obsessed periman; a
drunk denim-mender; a
strung out, acid-addled
draft-dodger...

It's clear
to me now:
I never had
a chance.

There's something
rotten reaching down
through the *center* of
me, coming from above
and spreading out
beneath...

SQUAWK!!

A blight in
my blood.

I wake up
and feel it in my
chest. This...
humming.

Every day
starts that way:
I'm all tensed up, like
one of those rubber
band balls.

So I pop
a pill: sometimes a
benzo, sometimes a
painkiller.

...whatever I
can get my hands
on to slow the
motor in my
heart.

But then I'm
totally zonked for
the rest of the day; I
just kind of float through
it all, physically present
but never really
there...

A ghost.

Nighttime mercifully
arrives, and after a drink
or two, I hit the sack early
(much to the chagrin of
my wife, who has recently
expressed her desire, for
some reason, to have
a baby with me).


The morning
alarm rings, and
the cycle begins
anew.



Shit.

I mean,
how long am
I expected to
hold on like
this?

How
long?

A man with dark hair, wearing a yellow short-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and brown shoes, is falling upside down from a large, thick tree trunk. He is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame. His arms are outstretched, and his legs are bent at the knees. A few green leaves are floating in the air around him. The tree trunk is brown and textured, with a large green leafy canopy on the left side. The ground at the bottom is covered in green grass and small yellow flowers. The background is a clear blue sky.

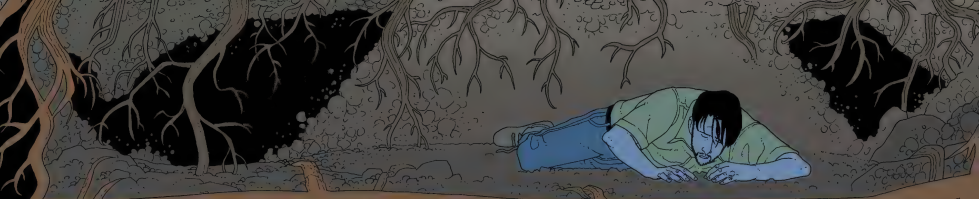
And how much of
this stuff is coded
directly into my
DNA?

When I take
an oxycodone before
work--when I let my
pupils shrink to nothing
and my mind balloon
up toward the
clouds...

Does Yitzhak
play a part? Is there
some piece of him--
and Mary Ellen, and
Pops--inside me,
precipitating my
descent?

I suppose
it makes no
difference. The
ground's right
there...

I'm
toast.



The tree branch that broke was your second cousin once removed.



"Removed." She died of an overdose, I think.

Or maybe it was drunk driving...



W-what are you? What is this place?

You came down the family tree, and then below.



We're in the roots now. The Understory.

And me...

I'm your daughter.



What?



Well, eventually. The sperm swims out of your thingy and into Momma's flower...

Nature is full of miracles! Did you know trees can communicate with each other from miles away?

I'm gonna be a dad?



Sure are, pal. But it's gonna take you a while to warm up to it.

...a long while.

I'm sorry...

You're gonna inherit it, too.

Duh. That's how trees work. But also.



Maybe I'll be fine?

Look. The door.

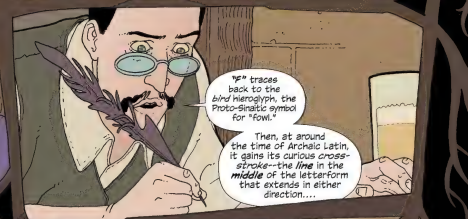


They're waiting for you, Daddy.


It's like that old Chinese proverb: "The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago..."



"The second best time is now."





The top of the image features a dark background with a horizontal band of bright yellow and orange dots, resembling a sunset or sunrise. Below this band, a network of dark, stylized tree roots extends across the width of the image, with some roots hanging down from the top edge.

**YOU CAN TURN
YOUR BOOK BACK TO ITS
NORMAL ORIENTATION
NOW.**



THERE, THAT'S
BETTER.

The MORPHOMETASIS

Chapter 27

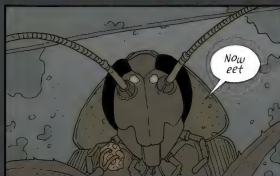


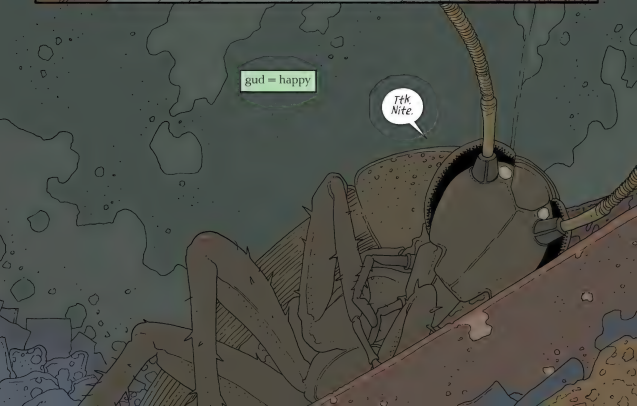






at home, me, Grg, sifts thru
be-loved **crumb pile**.







Next morning, all us
bugz scavenge **Old Train
Yard At Edge of City.**



Is great place for things
like **crumbs** and other
such **crumby morsels.**

But Mrk and Drf...they do
not talk to me! And I think
maybe their reason is:

I, Grg, have started a
changing process?

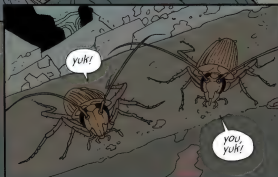
Grgs...

Mrk! Drf! My pals! Is Grg
not still your bug-brother,
despite the development of
these new and regrettable
aesthetic differences?



(Woah, my
wundz!)

Wut iz
happening
to me?



yuk!

you,
yuk!

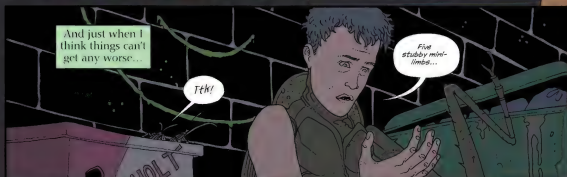


Later at night, a terrible discovery:



I find that I am now too **big** for box, inside which, you might recall, is beloved crumb pile.

And so Grg. me, must sleep outside, on alley ground, which is cold plus also kind of sticky.



And just when I think things can't get any worse...

Tch!

Five stubby mini-limbs...

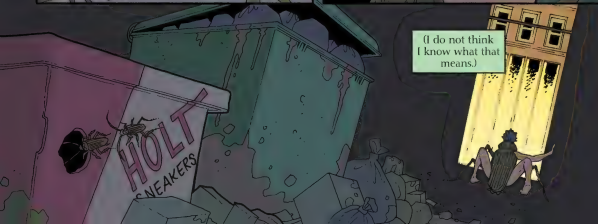


you, go

Grg, gud-by



Shunned from my own box; the cruelty of life's vicissitudes!



(I do not think I know what that means.)

[Am growing
out in world...

...supposedly the
stewardess had C4
in her duffel bag or
something.

BOOM!
Her whole carry-on
detonates
mid-air!

That's
nuts.

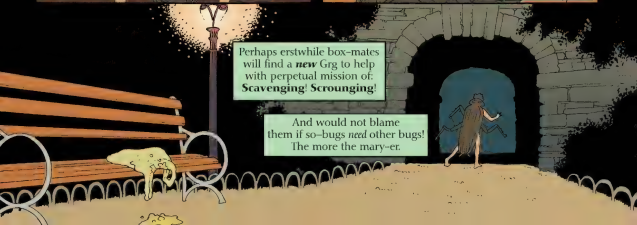
Must also note: quite
famished, having not
eaten crumbs or morsels of
any kind in many hours.

But we're
all going *down*
eventually,
aren't we?

Keep
looking at me
like that and I
just might...

Grg...

Grg very
hung-ree!



Had never
noticed before:

Wow.

So majestic, the fiery,
twilit blanket that drapes
itself across the sullen sky.

(I think I know
what that means.)

Thus sated, I do believe
it's time that I, Greg, hit
the proverbial sack.

-yawn-

...right here in
the cold-wet grass.

Goodnight,
beautiful world.

DAYS LATER...

Good morning,
beautiful world.

Another day of this
new, strange life.

Another day of:
flesh and bone and
human parts.

These are
Greg's feet.

These are Greg's
peepers.

These are
Greg's teeth.

How quickly, one becomes Greg.





Golly, these Morsels are delicious.

Listen to this:

"On Thursday, a couple ambling through the park around midnight claim to have been attacked by what they describe as some sort of giant *insectoid hybrid monster*..."



God in heaven. This world resembles a *nightmare* more and more every day.

...they should have a word for that.



I ought to be heading out.

If my *productivity* isn't up to snuff, Office Manager Jensen will be displeased!



Have a good day at school, bug.

"Let me sing to you now, of how people change into other things..."

I'm blessed to be
Greg, yes. **Absolutely.**
Without question.

But this new existence
is not without its difficulties,
especially when compared
to the *previous* me...

There are, of course, the
physical disparities:

In place of a hard carapace, Greg has
a fleshy, *achey* back; he has no *meso-
thoracic* legs for morsel-twiddling; he
is **completely** without antennae
for higher-level sensory relay.

Hey...

Don't forget
we've got counseling
tonight.

Oh. Right.
Counseling.

But more disorienting
than any of that: to be
Greg is to be caught up
in the unpleasant and
confusing *particulars* of lived
human experience...

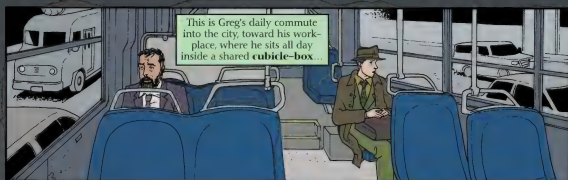
Marital strife; endless
financial stressors; a creeping
sense that any kind of positive,
worthwhile change is *illusory*...

I swear,
sometimes it's like
I barely even know
you...

Of course
you know me,
sweetheart...

...that everything,
forever, stays the same.

I'm
Greg.



This is Greg's daily commute into the city, toward his workplace, where he sits all day inside a shared **cubicle-box**...



This is the way Greg watches as the things of the world pass outside his bus window:

Cars with strange shapes; trees with strange names; oblong clouds cutting through light pollution...



This is how I, Greg, wait for the subway amongst a sea of exhausted faces.



...amongst throngs of fellow travelers, each embroiled in their own private battle against poverty of spirit, poverty of mind, poverty of bank account.



Teh!



...it's the way of all people.

Demoted.
Would you fucking
believe it?

We're *ants*,
Greg...









Your utilization is just great, Greg. Really.

The guys up top are loving your level of output.

As for the *quality* of the work--who's to say?

But the fact that you're doing *more* of it...well, isn't that what the job's all about?



I thought maybe I was getting demoted.

Demoted? A guy like you?



They could *nuke* this godforsaken place and you'd still find a way to crawl up from the rubble with a clean shirt.

...shame about Steve, though. But you gotta understand:



My opinion don't count for *squat* here.

I'm under someone's foot, just like the rest of you guys...



I'm trying my best not to get *squashed*, you know?





At the end of business hours, I take a shortcut through the underground parking garage.

This alternate route, I've found, saves me precious *person-steps*; too many of those, and Greg's "dogs" really start to "bark."

And that, I suppose, is where Greg's story begins to end...

Steve, please...

It wasn't my choice! This all comes from the top!

...put that thing away, man! Just think for a second!

I'm thinking crystal clear, Jensen.

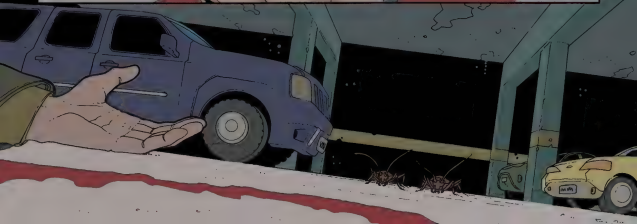
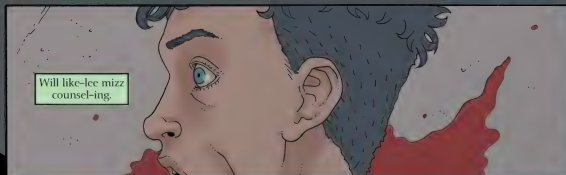
I'm wide awake.

BLAM!















earsplitting ('ir-spli-tiŋ), *adj.* distressingly loud or shrill; the act of bifurcating an ear.

effervescent (e-fər-'ve-sənt), *adj.* having the property of forming bubbles; marked by or expressing an appealingly lively quality.

effigy ('e-fə-jē), *n.* an image or representation especially of a person; a crude figure representing a hated person.



EFFIGY

egocentric (ē-gō-'sen-trik), *adj.* concerned with the individual rather than society; taking the ego as the starting point in philosophy; self-centered, selfish; limited in outlook or concern to one's own activities or needs.

emaciate (i-'mā-shē-āt), *v.t.* to cause to lose flesh so as to become very thin; to make feeble; (*v.i.*) to waste away physically.

emasculate (i-'ma-skyə-lāt), *v.* to deprive of strength, vigor, or spirit; to deprive of virility or procreative power; to remove the androecium of (a flower) in the process of artificial cross-pollination.

emergency (i-'mər-jən(t)-sē), *n.* an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action; an urgent need for assistance or relief.

empty ('em(p)-tē), *adj.* containing nothing; not occupied or inhabited; unfrequented; not pregnant; null; lacking reality, substance, meaning,

or value; destitute of effect or force; devoid of sense; hungry; idle; having no purpose or result; marked by the absence of human life, activity, or comfort. (see pg 876 for *v. sense*)

endanger (in-'dān-jər), *v.t.* to bring into danger or peril; (*v.i.*) to create a dangerous situation.

enflame (en-'flām), *v.t.* to excite to excessive or uncontrollable action or feeling; to make angry; to make more heated or violent; to set on fire; to cause to redden or grow hot from anger or excitement; to cause inflammation (in bodily tissue); (*v.i.*) to burst into flame; to become excited or angered; to become affected with inflammation.

enmity ('en-mə-'tē), *n.* positive, active, and typically mutual hatred or ill will.

entomology (en-tə-'mä-lə-jē), *n.* the branch of zoology that deals with insects and buggies.



ENTOMOLOGY

err ('ər), *v.* to make a mistake; to violate an accepted standard of; to stray.

etymology (e-tə-'mä-lə-jē), *n.* the history of a linguistic form (such as a word) shown by tracing its development since its earliest recorded occurrence in the language where it is found, by tracing its transmission from one language to another, by analyzing it into its component parts, by identifying its cognates in other languages, or by tracing it and its cognates to a common ancestral parentage in an ancestral language.

the etymologist rises

chapter twenty-eight; prince; morazzo; o'halloran



Trace a word back to its source and it will offer to you its **secrets**, as naked as Eve in Eden.

It is quite *confusing* to me, Mr. Gartner...

"Etymology"—my vocation—derives from the Greek *etimos*, which means "true."

You are a man who knows about bugs?



No, Sam. That's entomology.

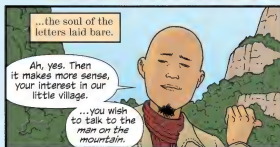
I study words.

At the mouth of the River of Language exists absolute truth...

...the soul of the letters laid bare.

Ah, yes. Then it makes more sense, your interest in our little village.

...you wish to talk to the man on the mountain.



The monk.

...I can pay you handsomely, Sam.



Money talks. But what does it say?

I can help you ascend, Mr. Brian Gartner.

But our journey requires a dragoman.



"Dragoman,"
an interpreter, a
guide for travelers.

From the Old Italian
dragomanno, from Middle Greek
dragomanos, from Arabic *tarjūmān*,
from Aramaic *turgēmanā*...

Catu will
show us the
way.

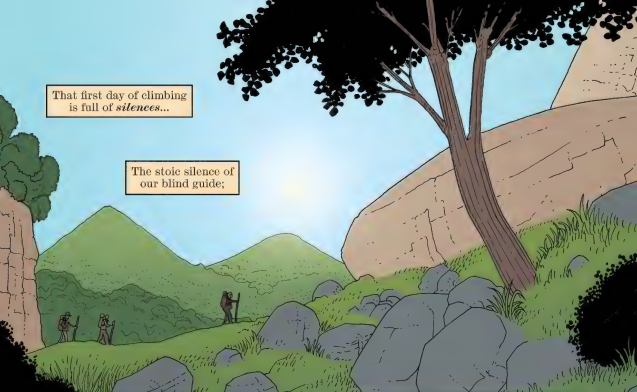


Sam's right, of course.
"See," from the Old
English *seon*...




"Up," *Catu*
says. "Up, up,
up!"

To know.




That first day of climbing
is full of *silences*...

The stoic silence of
our blind guide;




The eerie silence of the
mountain's strange fauna;



Wind rustles the
leaves of trees but
makes not a single
detectable sound...



...we must
camp for the night,
Mr. Gartner.



Catu says,
"The sun is a burning
candle; its wick will
soon be out."

...we must
camp for the night,
Mr. Gartner.

It all strikes me as a
kind of deference

Quiet courtesy to the prize at the top.

You call him "monk."

But our village has another word for the man who meditates on the peak...



The monk... he is a sorcerer. A magic person.

It. The word "wizard" dates back to the 15th century, you know. From the Middle English:

Wys, meaning "wise." A philosopher, a sage.

...knowledge is its own kind of magic, yes?



We continue our journey at dawn, when the candle lights anew.

That night, I dream of a river...

[illegible][illegible]

And I'm left with *nothing*.

Wake Up

Back, beast!

BACK!

And I'm left with *nothing*.

Wake Up

Back, beast!

BACK!

And I'm left with *nothing*.

Wake Up

Back, beast!

BACK!



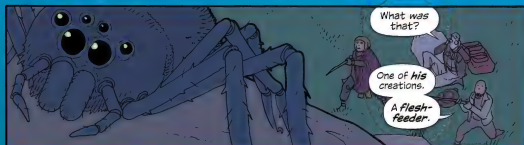
I said
BACK!!

RGGG



It is but
a child. A
babe.

FLY,
thing!



What was
that?

One of *his*
creations.

A *flesh-*
feeder.



...
...
...
...

Yes.
"Everything
eats and is
eaten."



You came
very close to
being dinner.



...
...
...
...

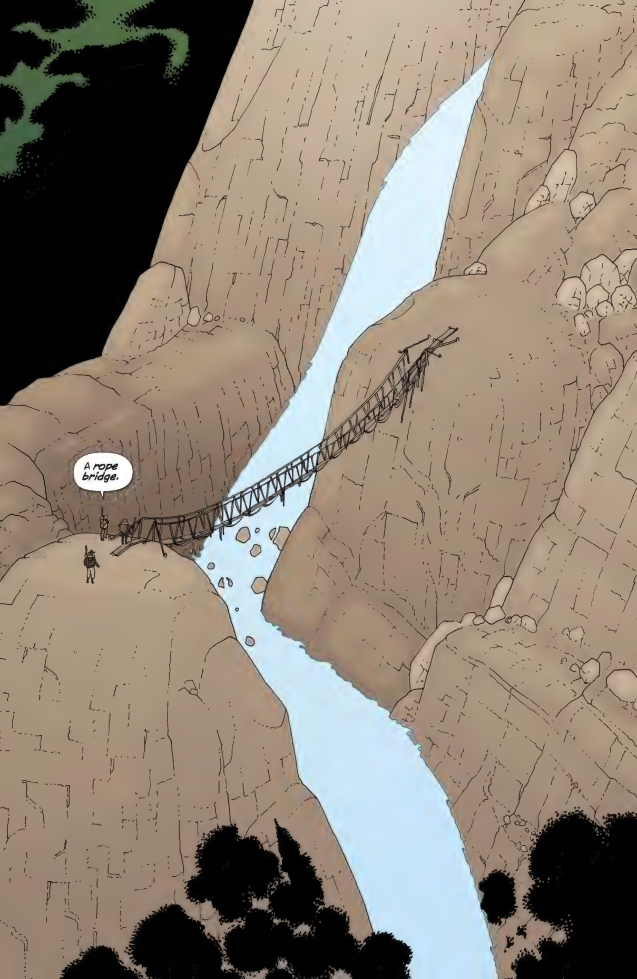
Naturally--
the next leg is even
more treacherous,
Mr. Gartner.

Marshal
your courage, if
you've not yet
lost it all.



It doesn't matter
either way:






A rope
bridge.



I've seen
this movie before.
One of the planks
always gives
out.



Tt!



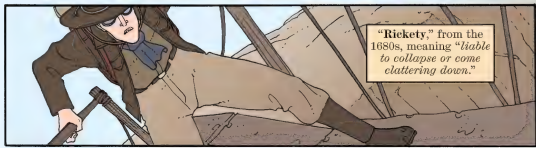
Life is no
movie, Mr. Gartner. We
have been tricked into
thinking we know how
a story goes.

But all
stories...




They are
ghost stories,
haunted by the
dead.

...nothing
is certain.



"Rickety," from the
1680s, meaning "*liable
to collapse or come
clattering down.*"



Borrowed, of course,
from the affliction we call
"rickets"—characterized
by weakness of the joints.

Trace a word back to
its source, and the truth
will present itself...

...as naked as Adam
splitting a rib.



Nightfall; another waning
of the candle in the sky.

We camp at the mouth of a
cave, sipping tea that Catu
steeps from the hillside's
multicolor flora.



It is good,
yes? *Rainbow tea*.
Curative properties,
my people say.

...I have a
wondering, Mr.
Gartner.



What does your
family make of this
expedition?

Your spouse,
children. It must
be scary for
them, no?



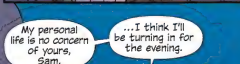
My wife and
daughter stopped
talking to me a long,
long time ago.

...they called me
an *obsessive*--said
that I was focused
on *language* to the
detriment and neglect
of all else...including
them.



You are
up here...

Are they
not perhaps
right?



My personal
life is no concern
of yours,
Sam.


...I think I'll
be turning in for
the evening.

In need of some distance
from my factotum and
his blind friend, I take
to my bedroll early...






...and am once again visited by strange visions.

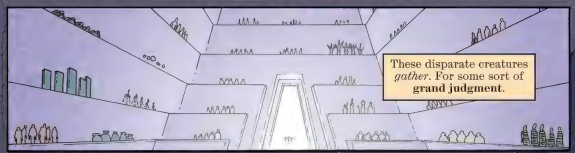


I dream of a grand procession of *magical beings*: angels, giants, nursemaids, talking trees...

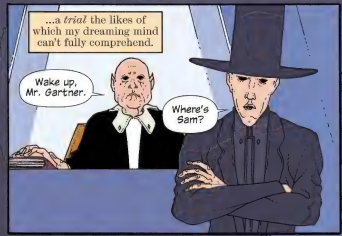


They all make their way to some sort of...*citadel*. A monolithic structure in the middle of an impossible place.

And inside...



These disparate creatures gather. For some sort of grand judgment.



...a *trial* the likes of which my dreaming mind can't fully comprehend.

Wake up, Mr. Gartner.

Where's Sam?



Sam?



...related to the Old High German *tarchan-jan*, "to hide..."

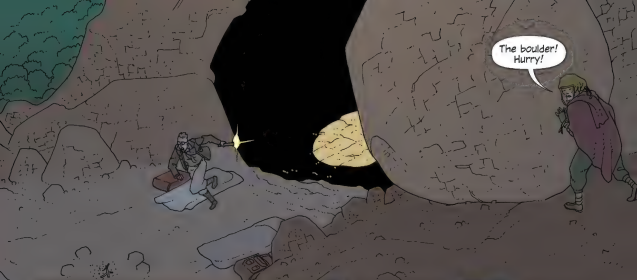


"To conceal."

GRRRR!







The boulder!
Hurry!



PUSH!!

Hfff!



ROLL!



You speak
English?

Only when
absolutely
necessary.

...it is a
language full of
holes--too many
spots to fall
through.



What
are you
doing?

Going
down, as we
all must.

There's
nothing for this,
Mr. Gartner. It's
madness.

You should
turn back while
you still can.



At the mouth of the River of Language exists absolute truth...

And the truth...is a monk.
"The smiling man," as the
texts refer to him.



A mountaintop ascetic
who harbors on the tip of
his tongue the **very first**
word—a single utterance
that can *cure cancer*...or
destroy an entire city.

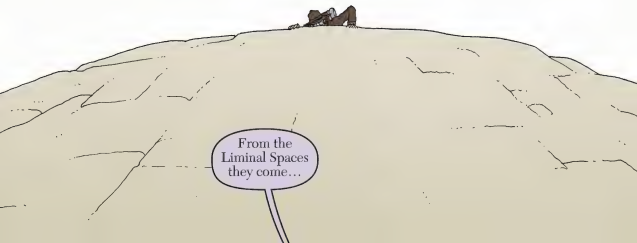
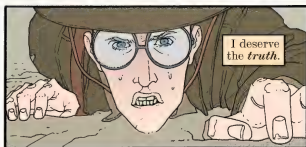


Should he whisper
this ancient sound
into your ear...well,
it's said that the
listener shall become
not unlike a *god*.



I have no interest in
godhood; it means
nothing to me.





...creatures on
the razor's edge
of reason.



Oh. Forgive
me. I was cycling
through to the
end.

Are you
him? The smiling
monk?



Sure,
why not?

And what,
little meat-puppet,
are *you*?



My name is
Brian Gartner. I'm an
etymologist.



So
you study
bugs?



...no. That's an
entomologist.

I study
words.



Oh, but
words *are*
bugs.

They *slither*
their way into your
skull and lay their
little eggs.



Too many
words rattling
around up there
and you've got
yourself an
infestation.



It gets so bad
for some people, they
have to call in the
exterminator.



I came all
the way here.
I made it to
the top.

...I want it.
The very first
word. *The*
source.

Opens all
doors, they
say....

Lean closer,
weary traveler,
and I'll whisper it
in your ear.

The rainbow
flowers are
poisonous.

Also
hallucinogenic
in nature...likely to
cause chimeras.

*Bad mojo,
Jojo.*

Wha...
Wrrr...

All of you down
there, in search
of some infinite,
unattainable
thing.

Your *grails*
and brass rings
and ultimate
treasures.

Nrrr...
nrrr--



...all will add
stones to the scale; all
will see the *fundamental*
litigation.



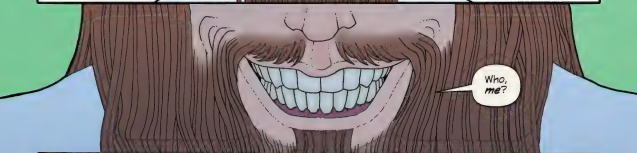
All will bear
witness to the grand
and final trial of
Riccardus...



The demon-
god with the *ice*
cream smile...



Who,
me?



end ('end), *n.* the part of an area that lies at the boundary; the point where something ceases to exist; the terminal unit of something spatial that is marked off by units; cessation of a course of action, pursuit, or activity; death, destruction; the ultimate state; something incomplete, fragmentary, or undersized; the object by virtue of or for the sake of which an event takes place; something that is extreme, ultimate; (*v.t.*) to bring to an end, destroy; to make up the end of; (*v.i.*) to come to an end; to reach a specified ultimate rank, situation, or place; die.



WE'RE ALL GOING DOWN



What follows are variant covers from the seventh volume of **ICE CREAM MAN**, including all the anniversary art from our party-sized 25th issue, as well as the "B" covers for issues 26-28. Featuring, in order: Zoe Thorogood, Yuko Shimizu, Martin Simmonds, Morrazo + O'Halloran, Alex Eckman-Lawn, Audrey Benjaminsen, and Mr. Eckman-Lawn once more.













The image features the Ice Cream Man character, a white, ice-cream-shaped figure with a smiling face, wearing a red and white striped straw hat. He is covered in white frosting, with chocolate syrup drizzled over his head and body. He is decorated with colorful sprinkles and has three red cherries on his head, shoulders, and at his feet. The character is set against a background of stylized, swirling white clouds or frosting. The text "Ice Cream Man" is written in a bold, black, serif font across his chest.

**Ice
Cream
Man™**





Ice Cream Man—the bestselling

anthological comic book series—continues here with four more unfortunate, enervating episodes of *descent*: a plane falls from the sky; a man climbs to the bottom of his family tree; a bug becomes a person; an etymologist finds the perfect word! It's a compendium of comedowns carefully calibrated for curious and crestfallen consumers...so come join us *down below*.

This seventh volume collects issues 25-28 of the critically acclaimed horror anthology from Eisner-nominated writer **W. Maxwell Prince** (HAHA, ONE WEEK IN THE LIBRARY), artist **Martín Morazzo** (*She Could Fly*, *The Electric Sublime*), and colorist **Chris O'Halloran** (TIME BEFORE TIME, *The Punisher*).

"A perfectly bitter confection for those with a taste for short-form shockers."

— *Publishers Weekly*

"You'll never look at your double-scoop the same way again."

— *Vulture/NYMag*

"We loved it like we love mint chocolate chip ice cream, which is to say we loved it a lot."

— *Nerdist*

"You'll want a scoop of this comic because we're in for a treat."

— *Geek.com*

"F*cking awesome. The writing is strange and deeply unsettling, and the artwork is gorgeous."

— *Brian K. Vaughan*

(SAGA, PAPER GIRLS)

"Incredibly good."

— *The Oregonian*

"Will have you questioning everything."

— *Amazon Book Review*



Horror
Rated M / Mature
Collects ICE CREAM MAN 25-28

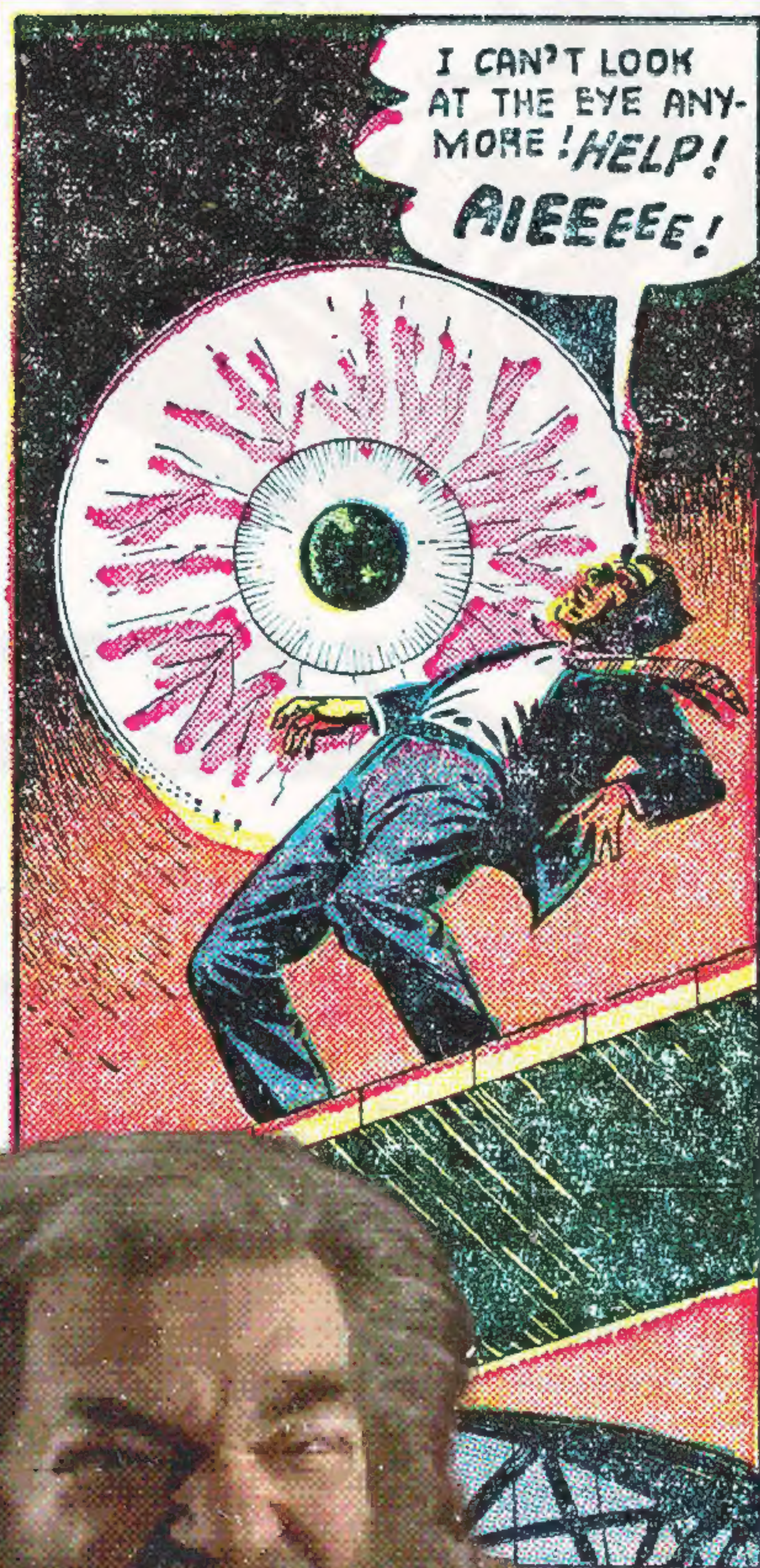
WITH A VA-VA-VA

A DR. VINK FANCY HD RIP

~ RIPPIN POORLY SINCE MAY 2022 ~

EDITOR'S NOTE:

THIS FANCY HD RIP WON'T TRIGGER ANYONE'S PHOBIA OF SCARY AI 😄
WORRY NOT! THOSE FRIGHTENING COMPUTERS LEFT THESE IMAGES UNTOUCHED



...AND I AM NOT A NUT BAG





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